

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2026**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 14

**SUBJECT: MODERNIZING THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY CHARTER TO STRENGTHEN
TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

San Diego County has grown into one of the largest and most complex county governments in the nation, managing more than \$8.6 billion in annual public spending and delivering essential services to over 3.3 million residents. With that scale comes an even greater responsibility to ensure public dollars are used effectively and decisions reflect the needs of the people we serve. As the County has grown, public expectations for transparency, accountability, and independent oversight have grown as well, yet the County's governing framework has not kept pace with that reality.

For many years, community organizations, civic leaders, and residents across the region have consistently called for greater transparency, clearer performance reporting, and stronger independent oversight of County decision-making. Together, these concerns make it harder for the public to understand how decisions are made, whether programs are working, and how their tax dollars are being spent. These concerns point to a widening gap between the scale and complexity of County government today and the oversight systems designed to ensure accountability to the public.

Key decisions affecting County budgets, programs, and service delivery are often shaped through internal staff-level analysis, with limited independent capacity to verify assumptions, evaluate performance, or assess policy alternatives. This creates two related challenges: it makes it harder for the public to clearly understand how decisions are made and how public dollars are spent, and it limits the ability of the Board of Supervisors, acting on behalf of County residents, to provide informed, effective oversight of a large and permanent County bureaucracy.

This charter modernization effort responds directly to those long-standing calls from residents and community stakeholders. Its purpose is to strengthen independent oversight, improve transparency and access to information, and clarify accountability so residents can have greater confidence that County government is working effectively, efficiently, and in the public interest.

Core Reform Priorities:

The proposed Charter updates establish core accountability tools designed to improve public understanding and strengthen effective oversight, including:

- **Independent Ethics Oversight** - Establishing independent ethics oversight applicable to elected County officials to ensure ethical standards are upheld through a transparent and impartial process that strengthens public trust in County leadership.
- **Independent Fiscal and Budget Analysis** - Providing the Board of Supervisors and the public with independent, impartial analysis of County budgets, long-term fiscal impacts, and policy tradeoffs before major decisions are made so public dollars are protected and tradeoffs are clearly understood.

- **Independent Evaluation of County Programs and Services** - Creating independent capacity to assess program performance and outcomes, strengthening accountability for results and service delivery, and helping the County improve what works and fix what doesn't.
- **Transparency in County Spending and Performance** - Expanding public access to clear, timely, and usable information about County spending, operations, and program performance so residents can more easily see how their government is performing.
- **Modernization and Clarification of Charter Provisions** - Updating outdated or unclear Charter language to improve clarity and legal durability and align with state law.
- **Accountability for Senior Appointed Leadership** - Creating and modernizing confirmation, removal, and accountability requirements for senior leadership roles to strengthen transparency and public confidence.
- **Clear and Reasonable Term Limits** - Aligning term limits for County elected leadership with California's 12-year legislative model by establishing a limit of three four-year terms for members of the Board of Supervisors and establishing a Charter framework that would apply the same three four-year limit to other Countywide elected offices if enabling legislation is ever enacted in the future by the State of California. This approach ensures immediate alignment for Supervisors while creating a consistent and standardized long-term accountability framework for all Countywide elected offices. This approach to term limits balances the importance of ensuring competence, expertise, and stability of elected leadership, with the value of encouraging new ideas and safeguarding against entrenchment.
- **Cost-Neutral Implementation** - All reforms will be implemented with no additional cost to taxpayers. This measure relies on existing resources, modernizes outdated structures, and reduces inefficiency, duplication, and waste. Over time, stronger oversight and clearer accountability are expected to yield long-term savings by preventing fraud, improving program effectiveness, and ensuring public dollars are spent as intended.

These reforms are designed to give residents, taxpayers, and their elected representatives stronger tools to understand, evaluate, and oversee how County government operates. The package is structured to be implemented without additional cost to taxpayers.

Today's action creates a community-led Charter Reform Implementation Task Force that will be convened to guide implementation, upon voter adoption. The Task Force will also be charged with developing a "County Bill of Rights" to clearly communicate the public's expectations for transparency, accountability, access, and equitable service delivery under the modernized Charter (see Appendix for examples).

This action advances Charter reforms that respond to long-standing calls from residents and community leaders for stronger transparency, accountability, and independent oversight.

If approved, the ordinance will return for a second reading on May 19, 2026, before being placed on the November 2026 ballot. Because these changes involve the County Charter, voters will have the final decision on how their government is structured and how accountability is strengthened.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER

1. Adopt a Resolution entitled: RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS PROPOSING AMENDMENTS TO THE CHARTER OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO ENTITLED “A TRANSPARENT, ACCOUNTABLE, MODERN COUNTY GOVERNMENT.”
2. Approve the introduction of the Ordinance (first reading) entitled: AN ORDINANCE CALLING A SPECIAL ELECTION TO BE CONSOLIDATED WITH THE STATEWIDE GENERAL ELECTION ON NOVEMBER 3, 2026 FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUBMITTING TO THE VOTERS AMENDMENTS TO THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY CHARTER ENTITLED “A TRANSPARENT, ACCOUNTABLE, MODERN COUNTY GOVERNMENT.”
3. Submit the Ordinance for further Board consideration and adoption (second reading) on May 19, 2026.
4. If the proposed amendments to the County Charter are passed, create the Charter Reform Implementation Task Force (The Task Force), co-chaired by Jack McGrory and Dr. Kyra Greene. Each member of the Board of Supervisors shall appoint one additional member to serve on the Task Force. The co-chairs may appoint additional temporary or advisory members as necessary to ensure subject-matter expertise and effective implementation. The Task Force shall be staffed by the Office of County Counsel and shall operate for a two-year period following its establishment.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action supports the County's commitment to equitable service delivery by strengthening transparency, accountability, and independent oversight of County government operations. Ensuring that public resources are managed effectively and that performance information is accessible to all residents supports more equitable outcomes across all communities served by the County.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action supports the County's long-term fiscal and operational sustainability by establishing independent oversight mechanisms and improving access to budget and performance information. Strengthening accountability structures and evidence-based decision-making supports responsible stewardship of public resources over time.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with today's actions and there will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. There may be future fiscal impacts [related to Recommendation 4], which staff would bring back to the Board for consideration and approval.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposed Charter reforms do not create new regulatory burdens or costs for businesses. By improving transparency, fiscal discipline, and government effectiveness, the reforms are expected to foster a more stable, predictable, and competitive local economic environment.

ACTION 14.1:

ON MOTION of Supervisor Lawson-Remer, seconded by Supervisor Montgomery Steppe, the Board of Supervisors took the following actions:

1. Adopted Resolution No. 26-024 entitled: RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS PROPOSING AMENDMENTS TO THE CHARTER OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO ENTITLED “A TRANSPARENT, ACCOUNTABLE, MODERN COUNTY GOVERNMENT.”
 - Amend the Resolution as follows:
 - a. Amend Section 500.4(e) of the Charter amendments to add “if not appointed by the Board”
 - b. Add to Section 501(b) of the Charter amendments to state, “The Board may, by ordinance, establish the Public Defender as an Officer to be appointed by the Board.”
 - c. Amend the ballot question in the resolution and ordinance to include potential Board appointment of the Public Defender
2. Approved the introduction of the Ordinance (first reading) entitled:
AN ORDINANCE CALLING A SPECIAL ELECTION TO BE CONSOLIDATED WITH THE STATEWIDE GENERAL ELECTION ON NOVEMBER 3, 2026 FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUBMITTING TO THE VOTERS AMENDMENTS TO THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY CHARTER ENTITLED “A TRANSPARENT, ACCOUNTABLE, MODERN COUNTY GOVERNMENT.”
3. Submitted the Ordinance for further Board consideration and adoption (second reading) on May 19, 2026.
4. If the proposed amendments to the County Charter are passed, create the Charter Reform Implementation Task Force (The Task Force), co-chaired by Jack McGrory and Dr. Kyra Greene. Each member of the Board of Supervisors shall appoint one additional member to serve on the Task Force. The co-chairs may appoint additional temporary or advisory members as necessary to ensure subject-matter expertise and effective implementation. The Task Force shall be staffed by the Office of County Counsel and shall operate for a two-year period following its establishment.
5. Authorized County Counsel to modify the text of the measure or the ballot question as required to conform to any requirements of the California Elections Code, other law, or the County Registrar of Voters.

AYES: Aguirre, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe

NOES: Anderson, Desmond

ACTION 14.2:

A motion was made by Supervisor Desmond, for the Board of Supervisors to amend the existing motion to add a provision to the Charter that the extension of the term limits to three terms does not apply to members of the current Board of Supervisors.

(Motion failed for lack of a second vote.)

State of California)
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed
by Andrew Potter

